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ABSTRACT

Within the military community there has been a growing concern for diminishing retention of active duty members, which has been directly related to dissatisfaction with military life by spouses and family members. The need for new services and programs attending to family issues was recognized and efforts were begun to develop such services. The Building Family Strengths model was created as a proactive program which can be instrumental in identifying and developing strengths in military families. For widespread dissemination of the program to military communities, it is imperative that those who work with military individuals and families be given the opportunity to acquire training and be able to present the program to those they serve. This report describes the first Building Family Strengths Facilitator Training Workshop held specifically for professional Support/Service Center staff representing military installations in southern California. Included are sections on the goals of the training workshop, actual implementation of the training program, the training program methodology, results and assessment, implications and recommendations, and a summary. The training progam agenda and a self-assessment questionnaire are appended. (NB)

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Building Family Strengths: Implementation of Professional Training Program for Military Family Application

Mary Davidson

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INTRODUCTION

Within the military community there has been in recent years, a growing concern for diminishing retention of active duty members, which has been directly related to dissatisfaction with military life by spouses and family members. The need for new services and programs attending to family issues was therefore recognized and efforts begun in that direction.

Family Support/Service Centers and similar organizations within the military were augmentated for the purpose of providing much needed support to military families. A primary responsibility of these Centers is development of family education programs to maintain healthy, functioning families, and to help families avert or alleviate problems before they affect the military member's effectiveness in performing his job.

The military family, just as its civilian counterpart, is experiencing many changes which necessitates looking at new alternatives and resources to achieve healthy family relationships. The military family, however, has unique factors which intensify the problem: the reality that the "mission", not the family must come first; the "family" has to operate within a greater "military family"; adapting necessary growth and change within the family to the rigid structure of the military job, position and status; feelings of detachment and isolation from the civilian community; large numbers of women in non-traditional roles, coupled with old-line stereotypic attitudes regarding

gender roles; difficulties of arranging joint reassignments when both spouses are active duty; the need for affordable 24-hour daycare facilities for working mothers and single parents who must be prepared for mobilization around the clock; a high percentage of cross-cultural marriages; separation from extended family support; and continual stresses of separation, reintegration, recalls, frequent uprooting and financial strain. (Kaslow and Ridenour, 1984)

In addition to these on-going problems, there is a growing awareness that the military member's satisfaction with the service, his specific job and ultimately his retention decision are directly related to family satisfaction and support. "It has become apparent that the family mission and the military mission are inextricably intertwined, and where there is disharmony or conflict at the family/organization interface, there exists an obstacle to optimal fulfillment of the mission for both social systems. There is, therefore, dollar payoff for the military if these conflicts can be attenuated or eliminated" (Hunter and Nice, 1978, p. vii).

Military supervisors have only recently begun to realize the critical connection between an effective, productive worker and the satisfaction of his family. Family stability contributes to individual and unit morale which enhances job performance and increases retention. Kaslow and Ridenour (1984) found that "healthy families provide productive, cost-beneficial employees."

There is, then, an obvious need for recognition and reinforcement of healthy family traits.

Healthy families--military and civilian--exhibit six specific characteristics, according to a major research study by Dr. Nick Stinnett (1985): Commitment to individual and family growth, a sense of Wellness, effective Communication skills, expressions of Appreciation, quality and quantity Time Together, and the ability to deal with Stress, Crisis and Conflict.

Families' ability to deal with stress relates directly to their ability to synthesize military regimentation, attitudes and values with their own; make use of humor and other defense mechanisms to sustain themselves against the many frustrations they encounter; be open to others' "tried and true" methods of adaptation; develop especially the family strengths of open communication and acceptance of expressions of feeling; promote a sense of unity and caring within the family.

The potentially very stressful situation of family separation and frequent moves can be experienced as family strengths--anticipation of moves/separations as "normal", acceptable; recognizing close family ties as a source of economic and social stability during the upheaval. Individual strengths identified by studies show that military children are intellectually brighter, better psychologically and socially adjusted and have fewer delinquency problems than their civilian counterparts. (Kaslow and Ridenour, 1984).

Although studies have shown that Air Force families are self-reliant and reluctant to seek out work associates and friends for help and support during difficult periods, the "healthier" families do so with ease. They also maintain within family members a strong sense of "mission" and shared purpose, mutual help among family members, and adaptive strategies for responding to crises, based on repeated opportunities to hone this skill--crisis equals challenge!

Strong military families also have a clearer grasp of the "global picture" and their part in it, an acknowledged healthy characteristic. This fosters empathy with other nationalities, and an understanding of patriotic loyalty among people.

Military families take pride in their successful accomplishment of maintaining a strong, healthy family within a demanding lifestyle largely beyond their control. Imposed structure makes it difficult for families to maintain fundamental strengths of adaptability and flexibility, as identified by McCubbin and Olson (1983). In addition, these researchers found that strengths of communication, conflict resolution, family pride, accord, sexuality, children and financial management play greater or lessor roles in overall family satisfaction at different <u>life stages</u>. It is therefore important to consider not only the specifics of military lifestyle, but the life <u>stage</u> as well, in building and enhancing family strengths.

A family wellness model focusing on family strengths is a novel approach in working with families in general, but even more unusual within the military community. The need for such a program is well documented in the Air Force "Families in Blue" study (USAF Chaplain Service, 1981), and in the pervasive assessment that strong, healthy, supportive military families have a direct, positive impact on the effectiveness and satisfaction of the active duty member and his decision to make the military a career.

The Building Family Strengths model is a powerful, proactive program which can be instrumental in identifying and developing strengths in military families. The program was developed on the basis of the research findings of Stinnett (1985), previously detailed.

For wide-spread dissemination of the program to military communities, it is imperative that those who work with military individuals and families be given the opportunity to acquire training and be able to present it to those they serve. The remainder of this paper is a report on the first Building Family Strengths Facilitator Training Workshop held specifically for professional Support/Service Center staff representing military installations in southern California. The training was held at Edwards Air Force Base, California, September, 1986.

GOALS

The goals of the first Building Family Strengths training workshop held for professionals working with military families were: 1) To equip military Support/Service Center participants with a practical, usable proactive program for identifying and developing strengths in the military families they serve. Successful training would be reflected in a high degree of support for and competency in the model; 2) By offering the training to representatives from all the Armed Services, information could be gathered on ideas and suggestions for adaptation of the model to meet the specific needs of military families.

Measurement for achievement of these goals was accomplished through a pretest/posttest questionnaire administered to participants; written evaluations of the program; self-evaluations assessed by the participants on their own knowledge, skills and delivery of the program; and results of a verbal evaluation/brainstorming session regarding perceived problems and necessary adaptations of the model for success with military families.

TRAINING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of any program through military Support/Service Centers begins with Base Commander support. A formal proposal stating program objective, target population, method, etc., must be presented to the Commander at the outset of program development. Commander support is crucial to the success of any program or activity on a military installation. Without it, the most promising project will fail.

Identification and contact of potential facilitators followed notification of Commander approval. Southern California military Support/Service Center professionals who work directly with military families were contacted by telephone, outlining the BFS project from its inception and detailing the role they would play in the nationwide dissemination of the program, should they take advantage of the free training being offered them.

"All families have strengths and I want to introduce you to an exciting proactive program which focuses on identifying and building strengths within families", was the emphasis of the initial telephone conversation. The response to the phone contacts was overwhelmingly positive. The directors, program workers, counselors and chaplains contacted were excited about finally being offered a program to focus on the strengths of families--a positve approach to family wellness. The only major hesitation in commitment to the training was available funds for

trip expenses, as Center budgets are very tight regarding training fund allocations.

Telephone contacts were followed by information packets sent to each of the Centers. The packet consisted of a more detailed account of the BFS project; a letter regarding training information; documentation of trainer's credentials; an application; and pretest questionnaire regarding applicant's prior knowledge and experience in areas of group facilitation, family strength concepts and ability to analyze and adapt personal style and program content to various groups.

Twelve Support/Service professionals applied for the training, of which ten actually participated. Demographic breakdown: Ages 25-50; 6 men, 4 women; 4 retired military, 2 active duty military, 4 civilian; 2 married to cross-cultural spouses; 1 minority (black).

The Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force were represented by professional staff to include: Program Coordinator, Program Worker, Family Caseworker, Chaplain, Active Duty Caseworker, Employee Assistance Counselor, Public Affairs Specialist and Center Director. Their areas of experience and expertise included public speaking, workshop facilitation, counseling highly dysfunctional families (alcohol, spouse and child abuse) and design/implementation of family education programs for the military community.

TRAINING PROGRAM METHODOLOGY

The training workshop was held in two eight-hour sessions and one two-hour evaluation period held on the third day. The group was provided with a "Facilitator's Manual", a "Family Manual" and a packet of "Family Exercises".

The first hour and a half of the workshop was devoted to establishing a comfortable, friendly learning environment for the group of participants. Since they would be working closely together and, ideally, learning much from each other in the next two days, it was imperative to build trust and rapport. This was achieved through "ice-breaking" introductions; establishment of group "ground rules"; acknowledgement of the "expectations and reservations" about the program and the training itself which each brought with them to the workshop. By finding out up-front what the participants anticipate and have concerns about, the trainer is in a much better position to achieve the training goals and provide the participants with what they need and expect, in order to successfully deliver the program at their facility.

The program training format for the remainder of the first day consisted of a mini-lecture on a specific family strength as identified by the Stinnett research, followed by a group exercise to demonstrate/reinforce the validity of that characteristic in strong families. Each training segment was

approximately one-half hour long, and delivered, condensed, as it would be to a family group workshop.

The last section for the day was reserved for questions, and involvement of each participant in signing up to present a segment of the program the next day, much the way it had been presented to them, but utilizing their own experience, talent and style to achieve personal competence in delivery (Agenda, Appendix A).

The second day of training was devoted to presentations of segments of the program by each participant. Each presenter was given 15-20 minutes to deliver his/her section, as if presenting to families. The facilitator would then receive feedback from the group on knowledge of material, organization and personal style. It was requested that feedback be concrete and specific for maximum benefit to the facilitator.

Training for the third day consisted of of dispersing remaining materials (posters, brochures), discussion of publicity procedures to attract families to the program, administering self-evaluations, posttest questionnaires and verbal group program evaluations. The majority of the final session was dedicated to discussion of perceived problems in delivering the model to <u>military</u> families and possible modifications to insure success in future workshops.

RESULTS/ASSESSMENT

Overall, the Building Family Strengths Facilitator Training Workshop was very successful, as reflected in all methods of evaluation--three individual written evaluation forms, one group verbal assessment.

The pretest/posttest self-assessment questionnaire (Appendix B) was intended to determine knowledge, skills and abilities in specific areas of group facilitation prior to and following training. Conclusions could then be drawn on changes in perceived knowledge, as a result of the training workshop.

Did those who felt "inadequate" (1,2,or 3 on the questionnaire) in certain areas gain in knowledge and confidence after training?

With only two exceptions, all six participants who assessed themselves on some of the questions (7-18) in the "inadequate" zone on the pretest, raised their assessment into the "adequate" zone on the posttest. Those who had judged themselves to be in the "adequate" zone on the pretest, most often remained the same or increased one level.

All respondents raised their self-assessment on the first six vital questions on family strengths concepts into the "adequate" zone (level 5 or 6).

Conclusion: 80% of the workshop participants felt as confident or more confident in their level of knowledge and skill in all areas of group facilitation measured; 100% increased their

knowledge and skill in the most important areas of family strengths concepts (questions 1-6).

Table I gives specific data on the effectiveness of the workshop itself. The data are conclusive by a mean assessment of 3.5 or higher on a 4 point scale, that the goal of successful presentation of the BFS model was achieved. In only one area--depth of information presented--did the mean assessment of the participants fall below 3.5.

Table I also reflects responses to open-ended questions on the workshop evaluation, which were positive with few exceptions. The final question on whether the workshop met expectations was answered "yes" by all ten participants--a conclusive indication of satisfaction, and, therefore, goal achievement.

TABLE I

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS FACILITATOR WORKSHOP EVALUATION
N=10

Family Strengths Content:	*Mean (4 pt. scale)*
Newness of information presented	*3.6*
Usefulness of information presented	*4.0*
Depth of information presented	*3.3*
Quality of information presented	*3.9*
Workshop Materials:	
Family Manual	*4.0*
Exercise Cards	*3.9*
Charts and Graphs	*3.75*
Worksheets	*3.5*
Brochures & Posters	*3.75*
Case Studies	*3.5*
Workshop Methods:	
Lectures/Presentations	*3.8*
Whole Group Discussions	*3.9*
Small Group Discussions	*3.8*
Role Play Activities	*3.89*
Simulations	*4.0*
Case Studies	*3.75*
SKill Exercises	*3.8*
Workshop Schedule:	
Organization of sessions	*3.9*
Time given to each session	*3.6*
Scheduling of breaks and rest periods	*3.7*
Diversity of activities	*3.8*
Opportunity for questions in sessions	*3.9*
Opportunity for interaction with others	*3.9*
Length of Workshop	*2.9*

TABLE I (continued)

What did you find most useful during the workshop?

Role Play/Skill Exercises (5)
Individual Presentations (4)
Program Package (2)
Facilitator
Opportunity for self-assessment
Sharing ideas, styles and materials

What did you find least useful during the workshop?

Physical set-up -- chairs arranged in a semi-circle
Not enough trainee practice at delivery of program
Nothing (4)

What did you like most about the workshop?

Sharing/learning with other professionals (4)
Personal Growth (3)
Presentations (2)
Facilitator's style, energy (2)
Smallness of group; better interaction
Family Support Center staff - helpful, friendly
Variety of backgrounds of participants
All of it (2)

What did you like least about the workshop?

Seating arrangements
Too short - more time needed for trainee practice
Wanted evening group social event
Little negative feedback for presenters
Nothing (3)

Please make any other comments you have for improving the workshop

A stretching experience
Longer workshop needed for more depth (2)
Provide alternatives to coffee
Impressed, learned a lot

Did this workshop meet your expectations? *Yes 10 No____*

Exceeded expectations
Built enthusiasm for program
Built confidence in ability to deliver to families
In future trainings, encourage team facilitation
Facilitator - competent, positive (2)

Table 2, data from Facilitator Self-Evaluation Checklist also shows conclusively that respondents felt confident and capable in their delivery of the program segments. A mean of 4.0 or higher (on a 5 point scale—1=to little extent, 5=to great extent), was rated by respondents on 85% of the questions. In addition, 80% of the group made a positive statement in the "comments" section at the end of the evaluation, regarding their perceived ability to use the program, e.g, "I feel I could present an excellent workshop on this topic", "I'm eager to start!"

TABLE 2

FACILITATOR SELF-EVALUATION CHECKLIST
N=10

QUESTIONS	*Mean (5 pt. scale)*
1. Demonstrated ability to verbalize thorough knowledge of course content.	*4.2*
2. Showed understanding of design and overall flow of course by interrelating sessions.	*4.2*
3. Provided specific examples of major learning points.	*4.1*
4. Was able to share own experience to enhance the course content.	*4.4*
5. Met the objectives of the session in training presentation.	*4.3*
6. Made effective use of audio-visual aids when appropriate.	*3.25*
7. Designed flipcharts which were creative, legible and useful.	*3.125*
8. Established environment conducive to learning.	*4.0*
9. Stated the session's goals and objectives.	*4.0*
10. Gave clear instructions for the exercises	*4.3*
11. Answered questions clearly and thoroughly.	*4.0*
12. Involved participants by use of open-ended questions.	*4.1*
13. Showed group leadership skills.	*4.2*
14. Checked out learner's comprehension of materials.	*3.9*
15. The use of feedback demonstrated was accurate, descriptive, specific and well-timed.	*4.0*
16. Received feedback non-defensively.	*4.2*
17. Made appropriate interventions.	*4.125*
18. Language was understandable and appropriate to the group.	*4.3*
19. Used experiential exercises to enhance the learning process in group.	*4.5*
20. Demonstrated the willingness to accurately assess personal training ability.	*4.3*

The verbal evaluation from the group, using flipchart, is illustrated in Table 3.

TABLE 3

	I Expected	I Didn't Expect
I Got	Program content covered Personal growth Usable program	Group unity/closeness New techniques/approaches from others To deliver presentation Variety of backgrounds of presenters Innovativeness of presenters Usable program (exceded expectations
I Didn't Get	Adult learning styles Small group interaction Education in leadership styles More complete presentation of model	Ferrari!

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The group of participants involved in the training workshop felt very strongly that the Building Family Strengths Program is usable with the military families they serve. They are in agreement that a proactive, family education program, such as BFS, will show its value in enhancement of family relationships, personal growth, increased job satisfaction and extension of military career.

In the verbal group brainstorming session regarding potential problems and suggested modifications for use with military families, these insights were provided:

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FOR PROGRAM SUCCESS WITHIN THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

Length of packaged program (10 sessions) - felt to be too long to attract mass participation.

Military commitments a priority for military members and families.

Intercultural marriages which present a language barrier for those who may benefit most from the program.

Confidentiality issues - military members "take care of own family matters" - workshop may be seen as "too public" or "inability to handle one's affairs".

Screening of families - if "mixed" group, establish specific ground rules (e.g., focus only on strengths of dysfunctional families, not on negative areas.)

Location for workshops - stigma attached to certain places (chapel, Mental Health, Social Actions - places that deal with "trouble," "sickness," etc.)

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS

Weekend marathons with added family activities.

Audio tapes on sections of the program in other languages.

Coordination with Chaplain on ship to deliver program to spouses at sea while spouses at home are participating with rest of family.

Use of video tapes in family workshop presentation.

Combine with other programs such as, "Achieving Your Potential" - program for enhancing self-esteem and personal growth.

Acquire Command support.

Conduct program within squadron/unit for homogeneity, confidentiality.

Conduct program sections through base schools, colleges.

Consider Armed Sevices YMCA program, "For the Kids' Sake," to run simultaneously with BFS for the younger kids.

Co-sponsor with another group - Officers' Wives Club, Enlisted Wives Club.

Encourage casual attire - no "rank" visible.

Incentive for family participation - certificates, pictures of "strong" families, a la Conan.

Present single segment workshops.

Break down segment on Stress, Conflict, Crisis.

SUMMARY

The first Building Family Strengths Facilitator Training Workshop was successful from almost every standpoint, and by all measurements achieved its goals. The only major area of adjustment recommended for future training sessions would be the length of the training. Written and verbal comments by all participants were consistent in recommending a longer, more in depth training workshop in order to provide trainees with additional time for practice presenting the material.

A second recommendation would be for the group to provide written feedback (evaluation) for each presenter. This would enable more honesty for maximum benefit to the presenter.

In addition, more attention should be paid in the future to the physical comfort of the trainees, (e.g., seating arrangements, refreshments).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS FACILITATOR TRAINING

AGENDA

TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER

8:30 - 9:45	*WELCOME!* *INTRODUCTIONS* *OVERVIEW OF TRAINING*
9:45 - 10:05	*WELCOME BY BASE COMMANDER, COLONEL ERNEST W. RAPALEE*
	BREAK
10:15 - 11:30	*PHASE I TRAINING* *OVERVIEW, COMMITMENT, WELLNESS* *EXERCISES*
11:30 - 1:00	*LUNCH*
1:00 - 2:40	*COMMUNICATION, LISTENING, REPHRASING* *PROBING/POSITIVE SPEAKING* *EXERCISES*
	BREAK
2:50 - 4:00	*APPRECIATION, TIME TOGETHER* *ABILITY TO DEAL WITH STRESS, CONFLICT & CRISIS* *EXERCISES*
4:00 - 4:30	*QUESTIONS???* *DISCUSS PHASE II*
4:30	*CLOSURE -- ADIOS!*

WEDNESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER

8:30 - 9:00	*COFFEE & DONUTS*
9:00 - 9:30	*??? ON BFS MODEL*
9:30 - 10:40	*PHASE II TRAINING*
	BREAK
10:50 - 11:35	*CONTINUE PHASE II*
11:35 - 1:00	*LUNCH*
1:00 - 2:35	*CONTINUE PHASE II*
	BREAK
2:45 - 4:00	*CONCLUDE PHASE II*

THURSDAY 25 SEPTEMBER

8:30 - 10 :00	*PUBLICITY* *MATERIALS* *EVALUATIONS* *POSTTEST*
	HAVE A SAFE TRIP HOME!!

APPENDIX B

Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Please assess your current level of performance for each of the following questions by circling the level of performance which you feel best describes your present level of knowledge or skill.

	Assessment Scale Inadequate					Adequate
Do you know the six family strengths identified in the Building Family Strengths model and the characteristics associated with each strength.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you familiar with the research on family strengths?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you able to interpret and understand Building Family Strengths research findings?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you proficient in applying the six family strengths identified in the BFS model in therapeutic or educational settings?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you able to assess the strengths of a family in therapeutic or educational settings?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you skilled in designing learning activities or intervention strategies for assisting others in using family strengths concepts?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Do you know the fundamentals of small group processes?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you good at analyzing different aspects of group processes?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you proficient in facilitating group learning processes?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Do you know the basic principles of the adult learning process?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you aware of the different teacher/ trainer styles and their impact on the adult learner?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you able to analyze your own teaching/ training style and recognize how to adapt it to different audiences	1	2	3	4	5	6
Can you assess cultural differences and how cultural difference may affect training?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you able to adapt training designs to meet the needs of different cultural groups?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Do you know different instructional methods and how these relate to different learning domains?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you proficient in using a variety of instructional methods to achieve course objectives?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you skilled in adapting existing training programs or curricula to local conditions?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Do you understand formal and informal program evaluation techniques and how to use evaluation in program assessment and design?	1	2	3	4	5	6

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